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SALT gives Soviets an edge, CIA says

By Bill Gertz
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The Soviet Union will hold a significant nuclear warhead advantage over the United States in the next five years if President Reagan complies with terms of the unratified SALT II treaty and dismantles several U.S. missile systems, according to secret CIA reports.

The CIA estimates, along with other classified government documents obtained by The Washington Times, challenge a fundamental element of the United States' three-pronged nuclear deterrent strategy composed of missiles, submarines and bombers.

U.S. compliance with the SALT II limitations, if combined with Soviet ABM violations, would undermine

this country's ability to penetrate Soviet defenses by way of close-range nuclear submarines, the documents conclude.

Both the United States and the Soviet Union have said they will observe the provisions of the treaty after it expires at the end of this year. The treaty was never ratified by the Senate. However, under an amendment to last year's Defense Department authorization bill, President Reagan has until this Saturday to report to Congress on whether or not the administration will continue to abide by the limits of the 1979 SALT II treaty.

The formulas limiting the numbers of weapons in the SALT treaty, while complex, were laboriously

negotiated to serve as the key elements moderating the superpower arms race.

If the president agrees to follow the SALT II provisions, the United States has two choices. Both involve a combination of Poseidon submarines and Minuteman missiles. The choices would involve dismantling a maximum of three Poseidon-class nuclear missile submarines or retiring up to 50 Minuteman III missiles within the next year. The total number of warheads that would be deactivated would be about 630.

The Soviets, to comply with SALT II over the next year, would only have to deactivate 115 warheads on four

Yankee-class submarines, two Hotel-class submarines and 45 SS-11 missiles.

During the period between 1985 and 1991, the CIA estimates, the United States, under the two options available to it, would deactivate 1,500 to 2,500 warheads, compared to only 500 warheads removed from the Soviet missile arsenal.

Related studies indicate that by 1988 the United States under SALT II restraints would have eliminated a total of about 1,200 multiple warhead weapons to a Soviet cutback of only 153 multiple warheads.

Only after 1990 will Soviet constraints under SALT significantly differ from non-SALT deployments, according to these documents.

One estimate shows the CIA believes that in 1990 the Soviets would have 11,500 to 12,500 nuclear missile warheads without abiding by SALT constraints and 10,500 to 11,500 warheads if SALT II levels are observed.

In contrast, U.S. missile warheads would total about 8,500 under a SALT II breakout program involving the deployment of the MX and Midgetman intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM).

Assuming U.S. compliance with the SALT II restrictions and an administration decision to deactivate 10 Poseidon submarines, the United States would reduce its warheads to a number less than the current number of warheads in its entire missile arsenal despite current and planned strategic modernization programs.

Of the two SALT compliance options, administration sources said dismantling the Poseidon submarines is preferred because the Navy does not want to rebuild the nuclear reactors of the 10 Poseidon submarines slated for deactivation.

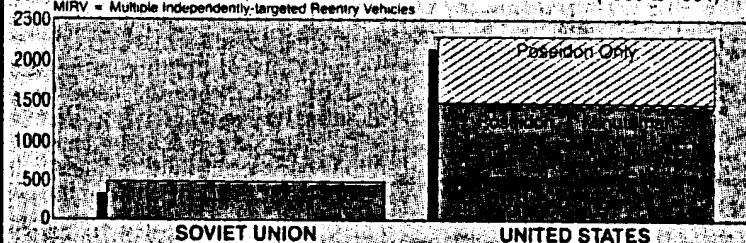
Sources said the cost of rebuilding the Poseidon reactor would be \$2 billion—the same as the cost of one Trident-class submarine that will replace the Poseidons as they are taken out of service.

Removal of the Poseidons, which have a capability of carrying 160 warheads, would diminish the number of U.S. warheads by 1,600 after all the submarines were deactivated.

The first of the Trident submarines, the USS Alaska, is scheduled for its sea trials in August. When fully in commission, the submarine's armament would put the United States in excess of the SALT limits by 14 missiles. One Trident carries 192 warheads.

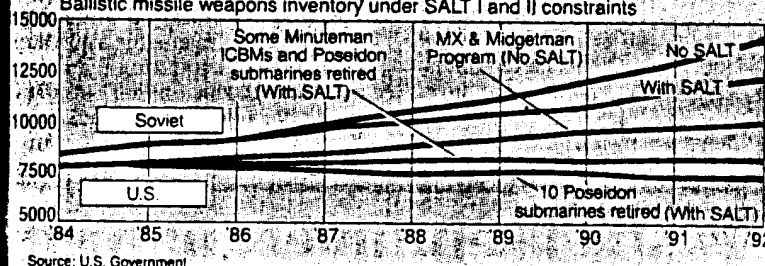
U.S. WARHEAD DISADVANTAGE UNDER SALT II

MIRVed warheads required to be dismantled for SALT I and II (1985 to 1991)
MIRV = Multiple Independently-Targeted Reentry Vehicles



COMPARISON OF U.S. AND SOVIET MISSILE DEPLOYMENTS

Ballistic missile weapons inventory under SALT I and II constraints



Source: U.S. Government